



# Racial and Ethnic Equity Committee

## *Community Stakeholder Introductions*

July 1, 2021

# WELCOME!



**Ana Yáñez Correa** has served as Deputy Director for JAD since June 2020. In this role, Ana manages the policy team, assists the Director and others on the team in developing and implementing the Department's strategic direction, maintains relationships with stakeholders, and oversees the public education, outreach, and policy research effort of the Department.

Ana has earned a BS in Criminal Justice and a Master's Degree in Public Administration from Midwest State University, and she also holds a Ph.D. from the University of Texas.

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# Harris County Justice and Safety Goal

- Harris County will **promote safe, healthy, thriving communities** through **restorative** and **evidence-based strategies** that:
  - foster public trust,
  - prevent violence and trauma,
  - reduce racial and economic disparities, and
  - minimize criminal justice system exposure where at all possible.

# Criminal Justice Coordinating Council

- The Harris County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (hereinafter referred to as HCCJCC or Council) was created by Order of Harris County Commissioners Court dated July 14, 2009.
- The Council works collectively to manage systemic challenges facing Harris County's criminal justice system and strengthen the overall well-being of our communities by developing and **recommending policies and practices that improve public safety, promote fairness, equity and accountability, and reduce unnecessary incarceration and criminal justice involvement in Harris County.**
- The Council collects and evaluates local criminal justice data to identify systemic issues and facilitates collaboration between agencies, experts, and community service providers to improve Harris County's criminal justice system in accordance with best practices.

# Racial and Ethnic Equity Committee

- Focuses on identifying and addressing racial and ethnic disparities throughout the criminal justice system and facilitating initiatives meant to advance equity by implementing meaningful community engagement strategies.
- Aims to support community-led initiatives that: 1) educate the public about the criminal justice system and increase transparency, 2) develop interventions that mitigate disparities, and 3) increase public safety by advancing best practices.

# Community Stakeholder Members



**Lubabah Abdullah, Esq.** currently serves as Executive Director of Tahirih Justice Center's Houston office which serves immigrant survivors of gender-based violence in a holistic manner. She brings over 20 years of experience at nonprofits, and is committed to consensus-building, rooted in values of transparent decision-making and communication. As a long-time attorney, Ms. Abdullah worked and led many non-profits around the United States. Much of her work has focused on creating a holistic approach to client's problems. She firmly believes that in helping a family address not just their legal problems, she is able to provide them the tools necessary to heal themselves, their children, their families, and their communities making us all stronger and more resilient.



My name is **Larry D. Brown Jr.** I currently serve as the facility administrator of detention at the Harris County Juvenile Probation Department. I came to understand and formally engage in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work over 25 years ago, but credit my life-experiences of growing up in Watts-Angeles, CA as the impetus for becoming involved in youth justice work. The combined experiences have heavily influenced my passion and service as a youth advocate, educator, juvenile justice practitioner, and researcher. My life's work and research is committed to critically examining the confluence of race, class, and gender, and its impact on educational and justice reforms that shape community-based alternatives and spaces that engage Black and Latinx youth.

# Community Stakeholder Members



My name is **Liyah Brown**. I moved to Houston last year to join the Texas Civil Rights Project as director of criminal law and policy. Since graduating law school in 2004 I have defended low-income people accused of serious crimes, challenged injustice across the U.S. and abroad, and fought to upend the carceral state and its profits. I was born and raised among Caribbean immigrants in inner-city Brooklyn at a (pre-gentrified) time when the war on drugs and NYPD ravaged BIPOC communities. The South (first Louisiana now Texas) is part of my Black liberation journey. Harris County is trailblazing!



**Brandi Ebanks Copes** joined the Justice Administration Department in January 2020 serving as the Racial Disparity and Fairness Administrator. She received her MPA from Cornell University, and a BA from Loyola University New Orleans.

# Community Stakeholder Members



My name is **Jessica Lorena Diaz**, I am a graduate of the University of Houston Law Center. I am a legal representative at Fe y Justicia Workers Center, where we focus on labor and immigration law. In my hometown of Pasadena, TX, I played a leading role in local organizing against SB4, a punitive law targeting sanctuary cities. I have continued to push for pro immigrant policies since 2012 and proceeded to focus on dismantling discrimination against all immigrants and empowering women of color.



**Karen Evans (Alternate)** has been the Community Engagement Manager with the Justice Administration Department team since March of 2020. She specializes in promoting community solutions to racial and ethnic disparities in the criminal justice system. Karen has a BA in Political Science with a minor in Pre-Law from Alcorn State University.



# Community Stakeholder Members



My name is **Caroleta Johnson** and I am currently serving the citizens of Houston as a Commander with the Houston Police Department. I have over 28 years of law enforcement experience and during my tenure as a manager within the Gang Division and South Central Patrol, I have been engaging the diverse communities and developing leaders to bridge the gap between the police and the citizens in order to build trust and transparency. It has been my passion to enhance public safety through a fair criminal justice system that holds criminals responsible for the crimes they commit and a law enforcement staff that holds itself accountable to the citizens they have sworn to protect.

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**Nasser Okello Midamba**

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**Katrina Camacho, Harris County Sheriff's Office (HCSO)**

# Community Stakeholder Members

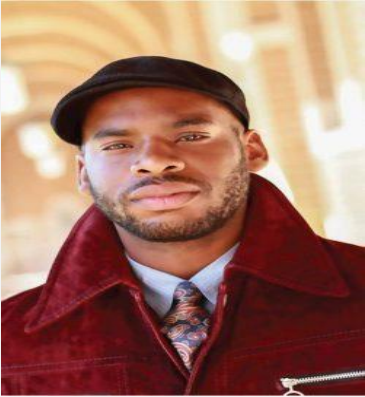


My name is **Monique Joseph** and I am a Client Advocate with Restoring Justice. As a Client Advocate, I work with individuals who are currently facing criminal charges get connected to the necessary resources they need to not just survive but thrive. I started organizing for criminal justice reform in Harris County after my husband was unjustly sentenced to 45 years in prison in 2017. Helplessly watching what happened to my family and seeing how my husband's incarceration turned my children into statistics compelled me to join the movement to reimagine justice, safety, and healing for our community. Our most vulnerable individuals and their families and children are currently being harmed by this racist system. My goal is to lift up their cries for change.



My name is **Arelia Johnson, Ph.D. (Alternate)** I currently work for Harris County Juvenile Probation Department as an equity training specialist as well as serve on our equity team. I am a native Houstonian who grew up in Sunnyside (south central Houston) and lived temporarily in Prince George's County, Maryland while earning my doctorate at Howard University. My focus areas social inequality, gender, sexuality, and policy. I began engaging in this work to better understand how marginalized groups are imagined, perceived, and interacted with by law enforcement agents and agencies during police encounters.

# Community Stakeholder Members



**Terrance "TK" Koontz** currently serves as Statewide Training Coordinator for the Texas Organizing Project. His path to service began after he was arrested in 2010. While sitting in the Harris County Jail, he witnessed the mistreatment of black and brown people, and he realized that the criminal justice system was essentially about class and racial oppression. Koontz walked away from the experience as a convicted felon. Since that time Koontz has worked without cease to reestablish his life by fighting as an activist and as an organizer for criminal justice reform.



My name is **Dav Lewis**. I currently serve as a founder of 2nd Chances.Life, board chair for NestQuest Houston, Co-Founder of Community Action Collective and Black Men Healing. My community engagement has been centered around marginalized communities that have been disproportionately affected by the criminal legal system and poverty. My work began in Los Angeles, CA and we expanded our work to Houston. I am a Texas native who's family has been greatly impaired by both the criminal legal system and poverty. My passion and commitment are directly connected to my personal experiences and purpose to leave this world a better place.

# Community Stakeholder Members

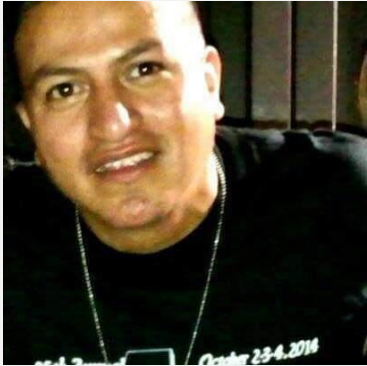


My name is **Carrie Rai** and I am the Director of Strategic Planning with the Coalition for the Homeless, Lead Agency to The Way Home Continuum of Care. The Coalition for the Homeless is the leader of the homeless response system for Harris, Fort Bend, and Montgomery Counties. I am a Licenced Master Social Worker and have been working in various sectors of social services for 15 years. My passion for criminal justice reform is rooted in the fact that that groups and communities that have historically struggled against oppression, discrimination, and indifference end up being overly criminalized and found personally responsible for systemic and societal failures.

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Greetings, my name is **Christopher Rivera** and I work as an Outreach Coordinator for the Texas Civil Rights Project. The communities I serve are those who are underserved, underprivileged, and marginalized by the judicial system. Living in the Third Ward you can feel an air of over-policing and the criminalization of communities of color. That is why I have joined the Racial and Ethnic Equity Committee to end unfair practices the county imposes on everyday people.

# Community Stakeholder Members



My Name is **Jose Vega** and I am currently The President of The Guadalupe Museo Aztlán Project, a multi-million dollar effort to start a grass-rooted museum within the 610 loop Houston Tx. to teach youth about our culture. I am also a proud member of LULAC. We concentrate mainly in large Hispanic-populated areas. I am a true believer that breaking walls is key. I decided to join The Racial and Ethnic Equity Committee because I see the unfairness that individuals in areas of color have to deal with first-hand and have been a spokes person with others in some of these cases. I plan to play a huge role in making a change and a change for the better.



My name is **Dianna Williams**, Organizing Manager for Texas Advocates for Justice (TAJ), a program of Grassroots Leadership. TAJ Houston became a chapter in 2016, birthed out of St. John's UMC Path to Freedom reentry program. Our members are formerly incarcerated and their families whom we educate, organize and mobilize to fight for changes within our criminal justice system. We are currently base building in the Fifth Ward and Third Ward sections of the city. The reason why I do what I do is because of lived experiences with family members being incarcerated, and I have seen the failure of the criminal justice system when it involves people of color. My hope is that through my work, I can make a difference in making the system an equitable system

# Community Stakeholder Members



I am **Kendrick White**. In June 2011, I founded the Gulf Coast Organization (GCO), a non-profit organization that serves K-12 and college students by connecting them to resources that position them to grow and succeed academically, professionally, and personally. Under my leadership, GCO has strategically expanded its service area from the west Harris County community of Addicks/Park Ten to deliver comprehensive educational and career planning programs and scholarships to students throughout the states of Texas and Louisiana. Through servant leadership, I am committed to strengthening communities by working collaboratively with stakeholders to develop and implement strategic plans that: (1) identify systemic sources of bias and marginalization; (2) create measurable and sustainable steps to eradicate the causes and effects of such methods; and (3) produce diversity, inclusion, and equity.



My name is **Jarvis Williams**. I currently serve as a Teacher Specialist for HISD where my work focuses on the school-to-prison pipeline within the alternatives school(s) specifically, I also work as an adjunct professor of paralegal studies for the Houston Community College. As an educator, an attorney, native Michigander born, raised, and educated in Detroit, Michigan I have a lifelong passion for advocacy and community change. My experiences with the criminal justice system as an advocate and attorney have shaped my outlook for justice and ignites my passion for reformation, rejuvenation, and reimagination of justice for *all* and not a select few.



# Community Stakeholder Members



My name is **Yvonne Mendoza (Alternate)**. I am a licensed Master of Social Work and have worked in different sectors to pursue and create democracy, diversity, and equity. Whether in the medical center, urban schools, non-profit mental health, or the legal framework it is evident that people of color are underserved (or not served at all); due to the systems that were not built for people like us. Born and raised in Houston, to Mexican immigrant parents, it is my belief that equity is created by breaking down what does not serve us and building it up more justly.



My name is **Dr. Gabriela "Gabi" Baeza Ventura (Alternate)**. I am an associate professor at the University of Houston in the Department of Hispanic Studies and Executive Editor at Arte Público Press. I am president of the Board for Children's Prison Arts Project (CPAP) and have been researching and working with the US Latinx community for over 30 years. My research focuses on Spanish-language advocacy and justice, critical race theory, children's, women's and immigrant literature, and digital humanities. I was born in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico and lived there until the age of 10 when my family moved to El Paso, Texas. I lived in El Paso until I finished by BA in Spanish and Translation at UTEP and then moved to Albuquerque, NM to attend the University of New Mexico for my masters in Spanish. I came to Houston in 1997 and being the PhD at the University of Houston. I have always had an interest in racial and ethnic issues that affect the US Latino community having lived on the border as well as reading and researching how language, class and racial discrimination impact communities of color disproportionately. Through CPAP I have been able to demonstrate that arts education can help incarcerated youth break out of destructive behaviors by building positive peer culture, provide non-violent solutions and critical thinking and self-love.

# "The Path Towards Structural Well-Being": Introduction and Overview



**Christopher James**

Site Manager, W. Haywood Burns Institute

**Christopher James** is a member of the Social Justice and Well-being team with the W. Haywood Burns Institute. Chris is working to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in adult and youth justice systems nationwide. He comes to the Burns Institute with the hopes of directly engaging system stakeholders on behalf of communities of color, which are all too often not given a voice in response to a system in which they are overrepresented. He brings a background of direct legal representation of students recommended for suspension and expulsion throughout the Greater New Orleans area. While completing his education, Christopher interned with the Youth Law Center in San Francisco, CA and the Federal Public Defender's Office in Miami, FL. Directly prior to joining the BI, Christopher worked to help develop, manage, and install a community advocacy program for foster youth in an underserved rural area.

After graduating Tulane Law School with the desire to become a public defender, Christopher eventually came to realize he wanted to have more of a widespread impact as opposed to doing good for individual clients while communities continued to be overwhelmed by a broken justice system. It was in law school Christopher came to really see the connection between youth justice systems, school discipline, and the adult criminal justice system. With that perspective, he has continued to advocate for youth and believes improvements in youth justice serve as the best models for developing strategies which can be implemented in adult systems. His passion for modeling adult justice systems on the progress and innovation within youth justice drives his commitment to the Burns Institute.



# Current Activities

The Committee already has a full plate which includes the following activities:

- Kickoff Meeting (July 1, 2021)
- Path To Structural Well-Being Training by The Burns Institute (July-August 2021)
- Review of performance metrics for awardees of community engagement grants that support community-led initiatives, increase transparency, and create interventions that mitigate disparities (July-August 2021)
- Assist with recruiting organizations to respond to upcoming RFP for 2<sup>nd</sup> round of Community Engagement Grants (August 2021)
- Prepare report for next CJCC meeting (TBD)

# THANK YOU !

For More Information Contact:

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